

Fossil Creek Comprehensive River Management Plan

Summary of Action Alternatives

Actions Common to All Action Alternatives

Wild and Scenic River Operations

- ORV's are protected or enhanced throughout the wild and scenic river corridor. Adaptive management may be used to make some adjustments to assure cultural and resource (ORV) protection.
- Year-round day use would be allowed.
- A permit and fee system would be used under all alternatives to access the wild and scenic river corridor year-round.
- A capacity alert system would be used so potential visitors could check on the capacity of the area prior to traveling to the WSR corridor.
- Capacity would be reduced from current numbers of users.
- Tribal ceremonies and Native American traditional cultural uses would be encouraged in the WSR corridor. Portions of Homestead would be available for tribal use at any time.

Site Restoration Activities

- Various restoration activities would occur, such as decommissioning closed roads, social roads and trails; springs restoration; and restoration along roads.
- Old Corral, and other sites in some alternatives, would be restored and closure orders would be implemented as needed to prohibit vehicle and pedestrian access.
- FR 502 safety improvements would include culvert modification, repair of the failing gabion structure, and scaling adjacent cliff walls.
- Routine drainage work would continue on FR 502, the portion of 708 open to public travel, and 9D.

Barriers and Potential Closures

- Various road gates, signs, and barriers would be used to direct traffic.
- Campfires, charcoal grills and glass would be prohibited.
- Roadside parking would be prohibited in the entire corridor.
- Cooking would be permitted on fuel stoves only.
- Temporary closures would be used to protect wildlife habitat when necessary.
- Camping would be prohibited in the Fossil Springs Botanical Area.
- Vehicle access into Stehr Lake would be eliminated; campfires and charcoal would be prohibited. Vehicle access and parking outside the corridor would follow the current Motorized Vehicle Use Map.

Recreation Facilities

- Two welcome stations would be built. The location of the west welcome center varies by alternative. The east welcome center is at the existing Fossil Springs Trailhead under all three alternatives.

- Designated creek access points would be delineated and signed at developed recreation sites. 1-3 hardened creek access routes per rec site would be provided from developed recreation sites to naturally hardened creek sides where possible.
- Delineated parking with sediment reduction features, kiosks, trash containers, and toilets may be provided at developed recreation sites.

Backcountry Activities

- In wilderness, the group size would be limited to 15 people or people and animals.
- Backcountry dispersed camping would be allowed year-round in the wilderness areas, starting at least one mile away from the recreational and wild segment boundaries.

Special Use Permits and Concessionaires

- Applications for new utility corridors and lines would not be accepted. Proposals to remove or relocate the existing utilities would be evaluated.
- Access for utility maintenance and repair would be allowed as stated in the special use permit.
- Special Use permits for research related to wild and scenic rivers and the outstandingly remarkable values would continue. Studies in the wild and scenic river corridor and adjacent designed wilderness would have restrictions including size, quantity, type, timing/duration of fixtures related to the research.
- There would be opportunities for outfitter-guides and concessionaires. The quantity and type of opportunities may vary by alternative.
- Special use recreation event permits would be allowed for select wild and scenic river dependent activities. The size limit for non-commercial groups (excluding tribes) would be 40 people. Permits for use would be very limited on weekend and holiday dates.
- Commercial filming and photography would be prohibited.

Environmental Education/Interpretation

- Interpretation would be provided using various types of media, the extent and type will vary by alternative.

Sustainability

- Environmental, economic and social sustainability would be incorporated into all alternatives. See Management Approach section of the CRMP.
- Implementation of alternatives may be phased depending upon availability of funding. Under the phased approach roads and/or developed sites may not be open to the public until improvements are provided.

Alternative A – Retention of Current Character

Alternative A would be the most similar alternative to current management and incorporates much of the stakeholder proposal. This alternative would retain most of the current recreation sites. It is the only alternative that allows camping year-round at 3 sites near Fossil Springs, and at some places in Middle Fossil Creek in the off-season.

Capacity

- The capacity for the corridor would be set at 308 persons at one time,

Roads

- Forest Service Road (FR) 708 would remain closed to all public travel from Tonto FR 591 (near Fossil Creek Trailhead) to Oak Trailhead.
- FR 708 would remain open to all motorized travel from the Oak Trailhead west to the Highway 260 near Camp Verde.
- Forest Road 502 would remain open to motorized travel from the junction with FR 708 to Childs and the Verde River.
- This alternative would close and/or decommission about 9 miles of motorized routes.
- Safety mitigations would be performed on 708 between Irving and the bridge.

Trails

- The existing system trails would remain open (with some name changes).
- Two new trails would be added.
 - One would be a short (up to 0.5 mile) interpretive trail at the west welcome center.
 - The Oak Trail (formerly Waterfall trail) would be designated a system trail.

Public Use

- All existing designated sites would remain open except for Old Corral.
- The Homestead site would be set aside primarily for tribal use. While no public vehicles would be permitted to park at Homestead, public non-motorized recreation would be allowed.

Camping

- Up to ten camping sites, distributed among several developed recreation sites, would be designated in Middle Fossil Creek. Camping would be allowed only in the low use season (currently October –April).
- Dispersed camping would be allowed year-round at 3 designated sites near the historic dam (maximum of 5 people per site).
- Dispersed camping would be prohibited in the remainder of the recreation segment in Fossil Creek WSR corridor.

Facilities

- Toilets would be provided near Fossil Springs.

Fossil Springs Botanical Area

- The botanical area boundary would be delineated, and recreation use would be limited to designated trails and sites. Proposed camping sites would be located outside the botanical area boundary.

Alternative B – Non-Motorized Experience

Alternative B would allow exploration of the corridor primarily by foot, horse and bicycle. Non-motorized recreation activities in a semi-primitive setting would be encouraged. Long distance backpacking and equestrian opportunities are emphasized. This alternative would reduce the number of developed recreation sites, close much of FR 708 in the WSR corridor to motorized traffic, and adds several new trails, some with loop opportunities and some designed for people of all abilities.

Capacity

- The capacity for the corridor would be set at 324 persons at one time.

Roads

- Tonto FR 708 road from Tonto FR 591 to Oak Trailhead would be closed to motor vehicles and converted to a non-motorized trail.
- FR 708 would remain open to motor vehicles from Highway 260 on the west (Camp Verde) side .
 - Most public vehicles would only be allowed to travel FR 708 as far as the 9D parking area.
 - Vehicles displaying a handicapped permit would be allowed to drive to Homestead, where 10 accessible parking spaces would be provided.
 - Non-motorized public use would be allowed from Homestead to the Oak Trailhead, but this section of FR 708 would continue to be used for administrative vehicle access.
 - Vehicle access would be provided to the owners of the private land near Bridge recreation site.
- FR 502 would be gated at its junction with FR 708. A non-fee permit would be required to drive through the Fossil Creek WSR corridor to Childs and the Verde River.

Trails

- Much of the current trail system would be retained.
 - The Flume Trail would be shortened to 3.2 miles and end at a viewpoint.
 - The remaining section of the Flume Trail to its junction with the Mail Trail (past the historic dam and Fossil Springs) would be decommissioned.
 - Since there would be no access to Fossil Springs but the Fossil Springs and Mail Trails remain open, the Fossil Springs trail becomes an extension of the Mail Trail and is therefore renamed South Mail Trail. Access to the Fossil Springs area would be considered by permit for limited wild and scenic dependent activities such as education, research, tribal activities, etc.
- Several new trails would be proposed.
 - A short interpretive trail would be constructed at the west side welcome center.
 - Convert FR 708 into a non-motorized trail from Homestead to the junction with Tonto FR 591.
 - An accessible trail would be constructed between the accessible parking spaces at Upper Homestead and the water's edge and another from Homestead along 708 to the Bridge, Irving, or even Oak TH.
 - The existing Oak Trail would be adopted as a system trail.
 - The Creek View Trail would be constructed in phases, based upon demonstrated demand. Project activities may eventually include converting sections of old road to trail, constructing new trail segments, and construction of a new trailhead near the 9D parking area.
 - Construct a rim overlook loop trail at South Mail Trail Trailhead (formerly Fossil Springs Trailhead). Some or all of this trail would be constructed to be accessible to all users. A spur would connect to the former FR 708 non-motorized trail.

- A portion of the FR 708 would be stabilized so that it could be accessible to all users between Homestead and the Bridge, and possibly all the way to Oak Trailhead.

Public Use

- The wilderness portals at Mazatzal and South Mail Trail Trailhead (formerly Fossil Springs Trailhead) would be retained. Sally May, Homestead, Bridge, Tonto Bench, Irving Waterfall and Oak Trailhead would be retained as developed recreation sites. A large parking area would be developed on FR 9D near the junction of FR 708 to provide parking for non-motorized use of developed recreation sites in Middle Fossil Creek.
- Purple Mountain recreation site would be closed to all recreational use and restored.
- The upper portion of Homestead would provide 10 accessible parking spaces for vehicles displaying a handicapped permit, as well as an accessible trail to the creek.
- The lower portion of the Homestead site would be closed to vehicular access by members of the public and set aside primarily for tribal or other special use. Non-motorized use by the public would be allowed in the lower portion.
- The portion of Fossil Creek WSR corridor from the end of Oak Trail upstream to the Mail Trail would be closed to public use. Areas of past recreational impacts located within this closed portion, particularly in the area of Fossil Springs and the historic dam, would be restored.

Camping

- Camping would be allowed by special permit only at the designated equestrian camps at South Mail Trail Trailhead and 9D Parking. Special camping permits primarily for long distance backpacker and equestrian users would be required.
- Dispersed camping would be prohibited in the remainder of the Fossil Creek WSR corridor.

Fossil Creek Botanical Area

- The botanical area boundary would be delineated and closed to all public use. Access to the Fossil Springs area would be considered by permit for limited wild and scenic dependent activities such as education, research, tribal activities, etc.

Alternative C – Motorized Use and Refugia

This alternative would allow the maximum access to the corridor by motorized vehicles, concentrate use at the most sustainable locations, and preserve portions of the corridor in their natural state. This alternative would provide the option of driving for pleasure. This would require both day use recreation permits and driving through only permits (no extended stopping within the corridor). Tonto FR 708 would be opened to public use in this alternative pending funding for completion of capital improvements and maintenance and with the caveat that the road will have regular seasonal closures (winter and monsoon) and closure any time a failure occurs. People would be concentrated primarily at three of the most naturally protected sites: the Bridge, Irving, and Sally May. Fossil Springs Trail from the rim to Mail Trail would be closed and restored.

Capacity

The capacity for the corridor would be set at 572 persons at one time. Developed recreation site capacity would be 412 people at one time, and additional drive through capacity would be 160 people (40 vehicles) per day.

Roads

- Forest Service Road 708 would be brought to a safe standard.
 - FR 708 from Tonto FR 591 to Irving Waterfall may be opened in a later phase when safety improvements are completed. This portion of the road may be closed seasonally or in response to rock fall or other safety hazards. It may also be closed due to lack of capacity to provide routine maintenance.
- FR 502 would be open year round to Childs and the Verde River.
- Safety mitigations would be performed on 708 between Irving and the bridge.

Trails

A portion of the current trail system would be retained and a new trail added.

- The Flume Trail would be shortened to 3.2 miles and end at a viewpoint.
- The remaining section of the Flume Trail to its junction with the Mail Trail (past the historic dam and Fossil Springs) would be decommissioned.
 - Access to the Fossil Springs area would be considered by permit for limited wild and scenic dependent activities such as education, research, tribal activities, etc.
- The Mail Trail would be open from the trailhead off of Highway 260 to the bottom of Fossil Creek drainage. The Mail Trail would no longer continue past the Coconino National Forest boundary.
- Fossil Springs and Oak trails would be closed and restored.
- Construct a rim overlook loop trail at South Mail Trail Trailhead (formerly Fossil Springs Trailhead). Some or all of this trail would be constructed to be accessible to all users. A spur would connect to the former FR 708 non-motorized trail.
- An accessible trail would be constructed between the accessible parking spaces at Upper Homestead and the water's edge.

Public Use

- The wilderness portal at Mazatzal would be retained. Sally May, Homestead, Bridge, and Irving would be retained as developed recreation sites.
- A new vehicle and pedestrian bridge would be constructed at Irving Waterfall along with a large developed site on the north/west side of the creek.

- The upper portion of Homestead would provide 10 accessible parking spaces for vehicles displaying a handicapped permit, as well as an accessible trail to the creek.
- The lower portion of the Homestead site would be closed to vehicular access by members of the public and set aside primarily for tribal or other special use. Non-motorized use by the public would be allowed in the lower portion.
- The Fossil Creek WSR corridor from the former Oak Trailhead to the junction with the Mail Trail would be closed to public use.
- Purple Mountain, Tonto Bench, Waterfall, and Fossil Springs recreation sites would be closed to all recreational use and restored.

Camping

- Dispersed camping would be prohibited in the remainder of the Fossil Creek WSR corridor.
- Dispersed camping would be prohibited within the botanical area.

Botanical Area

- Botanical Area boundary would be delineated, expanded, and closed to all public use. Access to the Fossil Springs area would be considered by permit for limited wild and scenic dependent activities such as education, research, tribal activities, etc.